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By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
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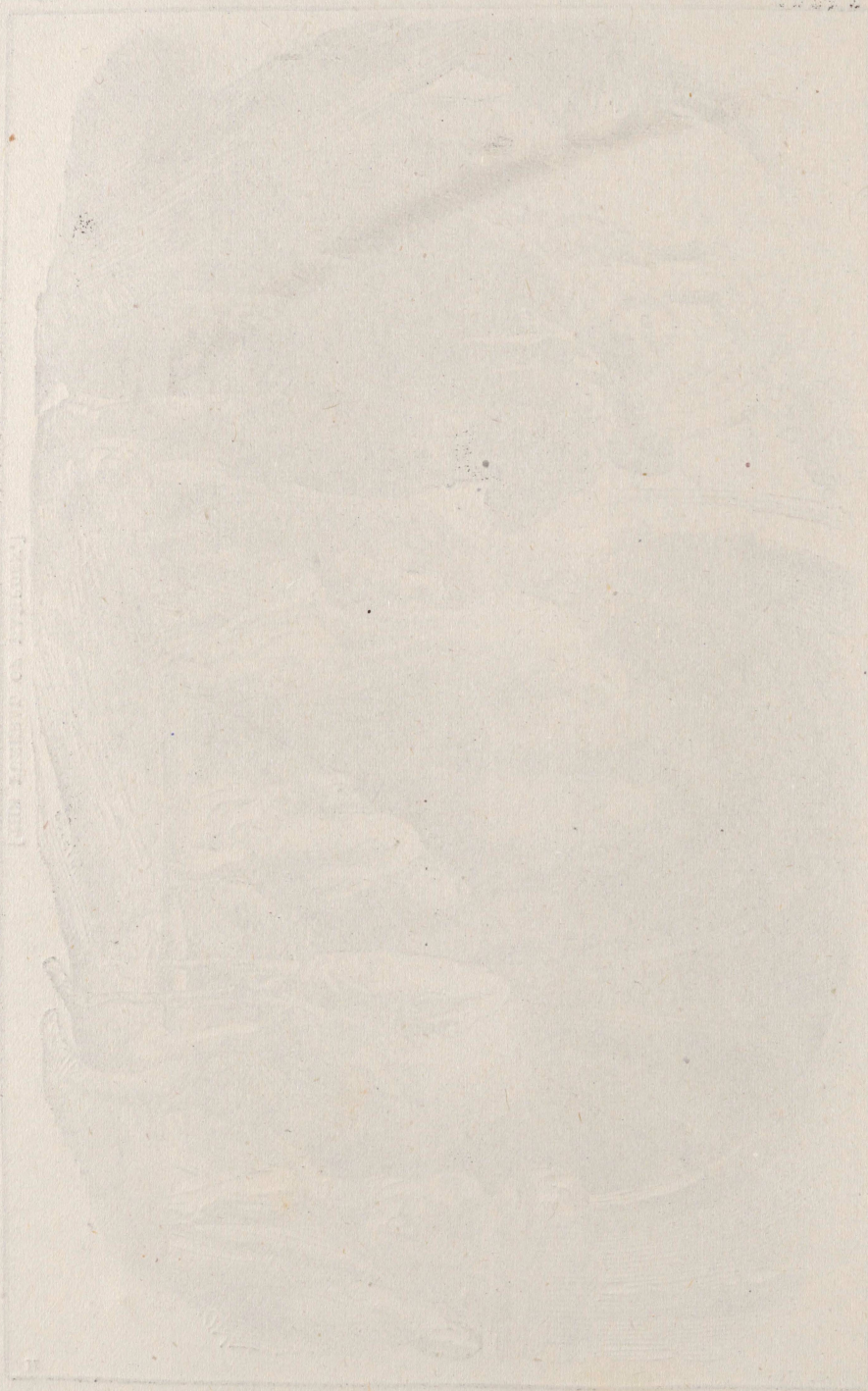
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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

inconsistency, altered his plan, and turned aside with his whole force towards Chinnor, where he surprised and slaughtered many Parliamentarians, and took about sixty prisoners.

The sun now rose, and discovered a party of horse, led by the patriot Hampden, who had slept that night at Wallingford, and who had vainly urged Essex the day before to strengthen his line by calling in his outposts.

A sharp encounter presently took place on Chalgrove Field amongst the standing corn. The Parliamentarians were checked and thrown into confusion, and Major Gunter slain. Hampden, who expected every moment to see the head of Essex's column, galloped up to rally and support the disordered horse of Gunter, and charged Rupert's right. As he was cheering on his gallant regiment, the Green Coats, he was struck in the shoulder by two carbine balls, which broke the bone and entered his body; the reins fell from his disabled arm, and with his head bent over his horse's neck, he turned away in agony from that fatal charge. His followers, disheartened at the sight, began to retreat, leaving many of their officers dead upon the field. The Royalists retired with their prisoners and booty to Oxford.

At first the wounded patriot, supported by that courage which sustains the patriot's cause, moved in the direction of his father-in-law Simeon's house, where in his youth he had married the first wife of his love at Pyrton; but the enemy's cavalry covered the plain in that direction, so he turned his horse's head and rode towards Thame.

It was a glorious sight to see the dying Hampden mastering by mental courage the body's agony, and, erect in the integrity of his heart, directing his jaded steed from the plain slippery with blood. No friend was near him, no kindred voice to breathe one word of pity or consolation. God knew the fortitude of the nature He had gifted, and accepted the last homage of its efforts. Finding that his sight waxed dim and his head swam lightly, Hampden, at the corner of the wood which skirted the plain, reined in his horse, and with great difficulty alighted from his gore-stained saddle. Fastening the bridle to a tree, he sank upon the bank, and prepared himself by prayer for his final struggle with the King of Terrors. The bolt had for him no sting; the armour of integrity was on him. Gradually he closed his eyes, as he believed, in death, and the calm sleep of forgetfulness stole over him. When he awoke he found himself upon a bed, in a respectable-looking house, and Mary, Sir Malcolm Keinton, and Martin bending over him.

CHAPTER VII.

SENSELESS from exhaustion, the great and good soldier of the people—the only man, perhaps, in that time of civil broil, whose heart beat purely and disinterestedly for his country's welfare, unsullied by a thought or wish of personal aggrandisement—Hampden had been found by Sir Malcolm Keinton and the faithful huntsman Martin. At first they thought that the gallant spirit had fled its tenement for ever. A faint sigh, as they raised him from the bank where he had fallen, undeceived them; and, despite their own danger, they conveyed him to the nearest habitation, the house of one Ezekiel Browne. It was night when they arrived, and the hospitable Puritan prevailed on them to accept of shelter till the morning.

"You have, indeed, been messengers of woe," he observed; "but, natheless, you are welcome to my humble roof."

"You know him, then?" observed the knight.

"He was the friend of my youth, the companion of my manhood," replied their host. "It will be an honour to have inscribed upon my tomb, 'Here lies the friend of Hampden.'"

With these words he quitted the apartment, for he saw the surgeon, whom one of his household had been hastily despatched on horseback to summon, in the act of alighting at his door.

"Hampden!" repeated Sir Malcolm; "have we, then, succoured that malignant enemy of our Royal master? Had I known it, he might have lain and rotted where he fell. I have scant mercy for the Roundheads."

This was uttered with a spirit foreign to the old man's generous nature; but at that moment his thoughts were of his ruined home, and his heart was heavy at seeing his dearly-cherished child a wayworn fugitive.

Mary heard the observation with regret. To her gentle heart, all who suffered had a claim to sympathy. Rising from the rude seat where she had been placed, she laid her hand upon her father's arm, and gently whispered in his ear the name of the young Master of Wilton. The old man understood the rebuke, and felt it.

"God forgive me!" he exclaimed, "my ungenerous words, and impute their sin to the times on which we have fallen. It is the curse of civil war," he added, "to break the bonds of nature, harden the heart, and breathe Cain's fratricidal spirit on us. Poor gentleman!—what right had I to reproach him?"

His daughter kissed his cheek. The act was like an absolving angel's ministry. He felt that he was forgiven.

On the first examination of his wounds the surgeon gave hopes of life; but the patriot felt himself that they were mortal. Their pain was excruciating, yet he almost immediately occupied himself

in writing letters to the Parliament concerning public affairs, which seemed desperate in his eyes, unless the irresolute and lazy spirit which had directed the army should give place to more manly resolution and active operation. He again sent to head-quarters to recommend the correction of those military errors to which he had fallen a sacrifice, to implore Essex to concentrate his army so as to cover London, and set at defiance the flying incursions of Rupert's horse. These duties once performed, his next request was to see those whose humanity had saved him from dying like a wounded stag, in solitude, without one kind voice to bid God speed him on his way—one kindly tear to soothe the pangs of dissolution.

"A woman!" he exclaimed, as the party entered the apartment, where, pale and exhausted from loss of blood, he lay stretched upon his couch of suffering. "But I might have guessed it. Beauty and charity were ever friends. Forgive this churlish weakness," he added, with a faint smile, "which prevents my rising to receive you, and accept the poor expression of a soldier's thanks."

"Shame not our slight service by offering them," replied Mary, gracefully, "for a simple duty of humanity. Are you much hurt?"

"To death," answered the patriot, calmly. "My fight on earth is ended, save that last one which all who partake of Adam's weakness pay as the penalty of Adam's sin. How went the battle?"

"As usual," sighed Sir Malcolm. "Childless mothers left on either side, and widowed women to mark the day with tears, but no advantage gained. The rebels—the forces of the Parliament," he added, correcting himself, unwilling to offer a discourtesy to a man he had served, by an ungracious expression, "have retired in good order. Neither are masters of the field."

"Thank Heaven! Then the errors of this day may be retrieved. From your speech, sir, I judge you to be a Royalist."

Mary checked the reply upon her father's lips by simply answering for him that they were Christians. The speaker understood the feeling which prompted her words, and repaid her for them by a smile.

"You are journeying towards London," he observed.

"Rather from it."

Hampden pressed no farther. The times were such that prudence commanded those who travelled to conceal their track; for private malice frequently borrowed the mask of public duty to gratify its hate."

"Your honour's horse," said old Martin, "is safe in Master Browne's stable;—a well-trained beast, sir; we found him close beside you; indeed, it was his neighing at our approach which first drew my master and young lady to the spot. Poor brute, one

would have thought it endowed with human reason, and calling for assistance, it seemed so joyed when we rode up."

"Poor Dapple! He has been my companion in many a saunter through the green lanes and woods of Hampden; has borne me through many a hard-fought field. I shall never mount him more. Keep him for my sake, lady; he is no less gentle than fleet. A child may guide him. I should regret to think he would fall into the hands of a harsh master."

The surgeon, who saw that conversation was exhausting the little that remained of strength in the frame of the dying man, insisted on his visitors retiring from the chamber, promising that they should be admitted in the morning to bid him farewell again, should his state admit it.

Hampden silently raised the hand of Mary to his lips, and she bent over his couch to bid him farewell for the night. His gentle spirit was soothed by the holiness of a commiserating woman's presence.

The house of Ezekiel Browne was situated at the extremity of a wood, about the distance of a bow-shot from the high road, and was surrounded on one side by a moat; for it had formerly been a residence of some note in the county, but having suffered from decay, it had long been abandoned by the descendants of the family who built it, and converted into a substantial farmhouse, still retaining, however, something of its original mansion-like appearance. Their hospitable host had ordered supper to be prepared in a long wainscoted room, which ran parallel with the wood. The windows were guarded by thick oaken shutters, which protected the lower story from any sudden attack, as it would have required more than common violence to force them.

The silence of the night was broken only by the loud patter of the rain, which fell heavily, driven by the wind against the casement. As it burst in gusts round the gable ends of the old house, Sir Malcolm rejoiced, as he watched, with the anxiety of parental love, the pale, harassed features of his child, that her delicate frame was sheltered from the pitiless storm; and although the humble roof which covered them was a poor exchange for the stately halls of Keinton, he gazed upon them complacently, and forgot that their master was a Roundhead; he even mastered his prejudice so far as to listen patiently, if not devoutly, to the long grace which Master Browne, according to household custom, pronounced before commencing the evening meal.

"It will prove a rough ride to-morrow, my poor girl," sighed the old man, listening to the tempest; "bad roads, wind and rain, are ill suited to a frame like thine."

"Let the maiden tarry here," replied their host; "if she fears danger, the obscurity of the roof will prove a protection, and Judith will willingly give up her chamber for a second night."

"Gladly, father," said his daughter, a pretty, demure-looking girl, whose rosy cheek and merry eye belied the stiff sober gown and linen wimple in which she was disguised, rather than arrayed.

"Not for me, father. I am country bred, and fear a hard ride less than many a silken courtier. I would a hundred times rather brave the tempest than sit here hour after hour watching the changeless sky, and counting each pulsation of my heart as it beats with the terror of anticipated evil."

"It will not need, lady," observed the huntsman; "the day will prove a fine one, or never trust old Martin's judgment more. The wind shifts too much for the rain to last after the moon has risen; besides which, it falls unevenly."

"Ay," said the master of the house, "like the impetuous bursts of human passion, when sorrow shakes it, before reason has tempered the measure of its griefs."

His daughter's rosy cheek blanched at the remark; for, from the look of the speaker, it was evidently directed towards her, although uttered in a general sense.

"Hush!" exclaimed Martin, starting from his seat at the lower end of the table; "I hear the tread of men."

There was a breathless pause; the half-raised glass remained suspended between the table and his lips in the old knight's hand; two large hounds which, half-asleep, had been stretched before the red embers on the hearth, suddenly pricked up their ears, and one of them uttered a low, inarticulate growl.

"I hear nothing," said Sir Malcolm, finishing his glass, and at the same time reaching his rapier, which on taking his seat at the table he had disembarrassed himself of.

"Nor I," added the master of the house; "besides which, the doors have long been fast."

"But I hear them," exclaimed Mary, whose sense of hearing terror had quickened; "their tread is stealthy as the tread of men intent on crime. God," added the poor girl, "for what are we reserved?"

A low creaking noise attracted the attention of the whole party, and caused them to direct their glance to one of the shutters. The large iron bolt which fastened it was distinctly seen to move slowly round; it was clear that someone on the outside was trying it. At the same moment both the dogs broke into a furious bark. Seeing they were discovered, the assailants, whoever they might be, deemed it no longer necessary to attempt a surprise, but moved round to the front of the house. The regular fall of the feet announced that they were military, and numerous.

"Royalists!" exclaimed Ezekiel Browne, with a stern glance at his child, who quailed before him.

"Parliamentarians, on my life," interrupted Sir Malcolm, who judged from their silence the party to which they belonged.

"Such were the steps of those who burnt and sacked my house at Keinton."

A loud crash, occasioned by the firing of a petard, caused the females to scream and the men to start from their seats. Mary had scarcely time to throw herself before her father to restrain him, when Barford, at the head of a party of fanatics, burst into the room; her heart sickened at the sight, for her worst terror was realised. This time old Martin was restrained by no scruple of conscience, but would willingly have shot him like a polecat, or any other beast of prey, had not the person of their host been interposed between him and his aim.

"What seek ye," demanded Ezekiel Browne, "that you burst into my house as into a den of thieves?"

"The persons of two traitors to the people's cause—the old malignant Sir Malcolm Keinton and his daughter."

"They are my guests."

"They are my prisoners," interrupted the ruffian, with a look of ferocious joy. "I told you, lady," he added, "that my debt was not yet paid. None ever yet escaped who wronged me."

The speaker advanced to clasp her, when a side door, which opened at the bottom of the staircase, slowly opened, and the dying Hampden, grasping his broken weapon, passed between him and his victim.

The agony occasioned by the effort caused the perspiration to fall in large clammy drops from his pale brow, beneath which his dark eyes flashed with the energy and wrath of a protecting spirit.

"What means this violence?" he demanded. "Why do I find midnight robbers disguised in the garb of soldiers of the people?"

Many of the party drew back ashamed, for they recognised the noble sufferer—knew well his patriotism, courage, and devotion to the welfare of his country. But others, who were more under the influence of Barford, still seemed inclined to press forward and execute his orders.

"They are traitors to the people—in whose name I arrest them."

"Without warrant?"

"When danger threatens the State, true patriots stand not upon form."

"Patriots!" repeated the wounded man, in a tone of withering scorn; "ay, such patriots as disgrace the cause they mar instead of serve—kennel-bred patriots, whom plunder incites to battle and cruelty to blood; whose weathercock support gold could buy and sell like a thing of vilest merchandise—patriots who draw the sword at passion's impulse without reflection, and sheathe it without honour."

"Here," said Sir Malcolm, "is the safe-conduct we received when we quitted London from the general of the Parliament. Read it, noble sir; it bears the signature of Essex."

Hampden took the paper and vainly endeavoured to decipher it ; a mist clouded his sight, and with difficulty he kept himself from fainting.

"A safe-conduct," replied Barford, with a triumphant smile, "as far as Oxford, but not to Exeter, to carry letters from Charles Stuart to the wanton whom he calls his queen."

"Is this so?" demanded the patriot of the trembling girl he had protected.

Even at that bitter moment she scorned to deceive the noble being who questioned her, to pollute her soul by falsehood. Overwhelmed by anguish at the prospect of again becoming Barford's prisoner, she sank upon her knees, and clasping the cold, white hand of the speaker, implored him to protect her.

"Save me!" she sobbed, "for the honour of the mother on whose chaste bosom you have lain!—by the memory of the wife whose love was sunlight to your eyes! That thing, whom I loathe, yet fear, hath vowed the ruin of my happiness. Save me from him!" she added, pointing to her enemy; "mercy will bless the deed, and Heaven reward it with its smile."

Moved by her terror, her youth, and innocence, and the warm tears which fell upon his clammy hand, Hampden gently raised her, and directed the fugitives to retreat, by the door through which he had entered, to his chamber, weakly deeming that the couch stained with his noble blood would prove a shrine from which even her enemies would hesitate to drag her. In his own god-like nature he but half-judged the villainy of man.

"What," exclaimed the old knight, "and leave you here to contend with these ruffians? Never!"

"For your child's sake," urged the patriot, in a fainting tone.

"Heaven, what cowards our affections make us!"

All this passed in so low a voice that Barford failed to catch its purport. Judith, who was a quick-witted girl, caught the half-fainting Mary by the arm, and led, or rather dragged, her to the staircase; Sir Malcolm and Martin, who were well armed, followed. No sooner had they passed than Hampden closed the door, and placing his back against it, to support himself, gazed with stern defiance upon the astonished Puritans.

"You pass not," he exclaimed, as their unworthy leader advanced, "but over my body."

"Be it so," replied the villain, resolutely, for his passions were excited to the highest pitch hearing the fugitives barricading the door above. "Though I trample thy soul out, they shall not escape me!"

Not one of his followers—and they were the very refuse of the Roundhead camp—ventured to lay a hand upon the wounded man. Their leader was compelled to do his sacrilegious work alone. Springing with a tiger-like bound upon the gallant Hampden, he

avoided the feeble blow aimed at him, and swinging him round, cast him fainting and helpless on the stone floor of the apartment. The sufferer's wounds broke out afresh, and his blood stained the spot where he fell.

"Where is now thy boast?" scoffingly demanded Barford, "where thy trust?" The distant sound of a bugle echoed through the pause of the storm, as if to reply to him.

"In Heaven and that cause which nerves the good man's arm," replied the patriot, raising himself upon his elbow, for he had recognised each note of the well-known signal. "They come—my faithful Green-coats—men of high impulse and true hearts—men who are knit to me in honour's sacred ties—men whom God pronounces worthy of the name as He weighs them in the balance of His hand."

The ruffian trembled, for the "Green-coats" was the name by which the regiment Hampden had armed, raised, and equipped at his own expense was known. They loved and revered him like a father, and he relied on them as his children. Several of Barford's men rushed from the apartment to ascertain if the dying chief was right, and others to escape the consequence of their leader's brutality.

The tread of the horses now became distinct. One of the Round-heads returned and told Barford that the words of the man whom he had outraged were too true—they were indeed the "Green-coats."

"I knew it. They come; my children come—my protectors—my avengers!"

The midnight assailants rushed to the door in the vain hope of escaping, but it was too late. Ezekiel Browne, who had encountered them at the end of the wood, whither he had gone in the hope of summoning assistance, had informed them of the danger of their commander, and they permitted not a man to leave the house. They were disarmed and bound in a few minutes; sentries were placed round the mansion by those who conducted them, and strict orders given that none should pass from it without a written order, signed either by Cromwell or Milton, who accompanied them. The illustrious poet raised his dying friend, and supported him upon his breast. It was a glorious sight—the martyr of liberty expiring in the arms of genius. The stern soldiers gathered mournfully round.

"Thou art dying, Hampden," said Milton, his rich voice trembling with emotion, "in the prime of manhood and of usefulness, thy glorious task but half-accomplished."

"Heaven," said his friend, "will achieve the rest. Perchance 'tis wisest, best; success might have taught my heart ambition, sullied its high thoughts by pride or passion: the soul is oft corrupted by the clay which shrines it."

Cromwell, who had been questioning the prisoners, and learnt all that passed, turned abruptly to the speaker, and fixing his glance upon him with a singular expression, as if his words had awakened an echo in his own conscious heart, exclaimed:

"Pray for those who are left, John; pray for the weak spirits struggling with the flesh, that they turn not their glory to a shame, but pursue the end fearless and undefiled."

The deathless poet—who has left his name a household word amongst us, whose glorious song, breathing the holiness of thought, is heard in lands where civilisation smiles in its cradle or slumbers near its tomb—sank upon his knees beside his friend, and uttered forth a prayer which hallowed the sacrifice it mourned, free from the weakness of humanity, from the weak heart's repinings. It rendered thanks for a life of usefulness and a death of honour, and offered both in humble confidence to the mercy of the Judge of all men.

The sweet calm of resignation fell on those who heard him; his deep, rich voice sank like the balm of time upon the grief of all; even Cromwell's iron nature was melted at the sound of it.

"I cannot give thee tears, John," he exclaimed, when the aspirations of the poet were at an end—silence, like a cloud, had fallen over all—"but I can avenge thee. Draw forth a file of men."

The Green-coats guessed his purpose, and shouldering their arms, formed their ranks with alacrity.

Barford also guessed it, and trembled; for the cruel and treacherous are generally cowards.

"Lead forth your prisoners," continued the speaker, in a harsh voice, "and in five minutes let me hear the signal that justice is accomplished."

"Mercy!" exclaimed several of the men; "we but obeyed our orders."

"Justice!" sternly repeated their judge; "the measure of your crimes is full."

Hampden, who had heard the order, opened his half-closed eyes, and motioned to stay the execution. So much was he beloved, so perfect was the discipline in which he had trained his men, that they paused by habit, and waited reverentially for his commands.

"Not for me," he murmured; "not for me. Let not the blood, even of the guilty, be shed to avenge my injury. Promise me this," he added, "that I may rest in peace."

Milton smiled—the noble nature of his dying friend had not belied his judgment.

"I promise thee," said Cromwell; "thy last requests are sacred."

"Release them, then."

The men waited for no second command—the wish of their leader was law to them.

The future Protector approached the trembling Barford, released

from death by the mercy of the man he had so brutally assailed ; and, fixing upon him a glance which long haunted him, bade him depart.

"Go," he exclaimed, "with the reproach of all good men; and repent, if Heaven hath given thee grace for penitence. Cross not my path again ; for if I catch thee tripping but a hair's breadth, as the Lord liveth, *by thy deeds I'll judge thee.*"

With a look of mingled disappointment and rage, the cowardly wretch quitted the house. The men shrank from him as from a loathsome thing, fearing lest he should contaminate them by his touch as he passed by them. Nothing less sacred than the wishes of their leader could have saved his worthless life from being sacrificed to their resentment. He wandered forth with a curse like the brand of Cain upon his brow. The hand which had struck the wounded Hampden could never again draw the sword in the cause for which he died.

"And now, fellow-soldier in life's battle, a word. Those whom I would have protected from the fury of that bad man are Royalists."

"Royalists !" repeated Cromwell, with an air of surprise.

"On their way to join the queen at Exeter."

The brow of the listener became more and more clouded.

"They succoured me when they found me bleeding and senseless on the field, nor asked the cause I fell for. There is a poor girl, and a grey-haired man, her father ; give them safe-conduct, Cromwell, and respect it," he added, "for my sake."

"They may be prisoners of importance ; urge it not ; I dare not tamper with my duty."

"I must do it, then," replied the patriot, "I and Milton. I will sign it with my blood. Few who respect the name of Englishmen will violate it," he added, with a look of honest pride. "*Cromwell, thou art not master yet !*"

The words seemed to be a reply to the whisperings of the iron soldier's secret conscience : he feared the searching eye of the dying patriot. Hastily tearing a leaf from his tablets, he wrote the required protection, and, placing it in his hand, stalked gloomily from the apartment.

Day was beginning to dawn as he left the house. Hurrying past the outposts, he plunged into the wood. He was in one of those humours in which the eye of man was hateful to him ; the very rustling of the trees annoyed him ; he would, if possible, have fled from the echo of his own tread, for a gloomy spirit was upon him.

"I am not master yet," he repeated ; "*shall I be master ?* and, if so, at what price, or to what end ? I have wrestled with temptation, and it will not leave me. Vainly would I persuade myself that England's good alone directs my energies ; but truth, stern truth, shows me the darkened shadow of my soul—the slime of the

serpent—which hath dimmed its brightness. Alack ! how weak is nature confronted with occasion ! ”

The man, in whose composition so many opposing elements were blended, sank upon his knees, in the wild, enthusiastic spirit of his sect, to call upon the Lord. Fearful was the struggle which his prayer evinced as he unmasked his heart—laid bare the secret recesses where melancholy thoughts and foul desires, instinct with latent life, lay hidden, waiting but a breath to call them into active being—monsters destroying the happiness and purity of the home in which they are engendered.

“Why should this good man’s death rejoice me ? ” he exclaimed ; “why should I regard it as a thorn from my path ; a crowning and a favour, instead of a lesson and a sorrow ! Strengthen my spirit to a better judgment, cleanse my soul of its corruptions ! I am as a reed bowed by passion, unless Thou sustainest me ! Uphold me for thine honour ! Save me from myself.”

For nearly an hour the great leader of the Independents continued in the same impassioned strain till his eloquence was exhausted, or his soul had found the consolation he required. Believing as he did in the direct interposition of the Deity in influencing human events, he considered the consoling influence which prayer invariably gives to all who employ it fervently as an answer to his supplications. The kneeling man was startled by a footstep stealthily making its way through the underwood. He rose hastily, for he hated that curious eyes should pry into his weaknesses, or idle tongues babble of the outpourings of his spirit. Barford, his tempter, again stood beside him.

“Still here ! ” exclaimed Cromwell, with a frown.

“Ay,” replied the Puritan, “I follow thy shadow because I know the greatness of the soul which casts it upon the earth—know that even now thou hast regretted the weakness of a moment. It is not yet too late.”

“Too late for what ? ”

“To arrest the messenger of Charles Stuart to his queen, perchance to obtain a key to his machinations against the welfare of his people and the liberties of England—*his secret treaty for the aid of France.*”

At this moment Sir Malcolm Keinton, his daughter, and Martin—his young mistress mounted on the steed, poor Hampden’s dying gift—passed at the end of the avenue, escorted by a dozen of the Green-coats, who, at their commander’s request, had undertaken to protect them beyond the chance of interruption on their way. The evil spirit wrestled strongly in Cromwell’s heart, but the memory of his pledge to the dying patriot restrained him, and he turned his eyes away.

“The hour escapes thee,” whispered Barford ; “anon, and the occasion may not be recalled. Speak but the word, and——”

"No," sternly replied the weak but great leader of the Puritans, "my word is given."

"Give me authority to do it, then."

"That were to break, with a coward's courage, the spirit of my promise. Begone, and leave me."

"Wilt pardon me the attempt," demanded the villain, "if, in the people's cause, I make it?"

"Success," said Cromwell, and the perspiration started from his flushed brow as he spoke, "is seldom unforgiven. I neither threat nor promise thee; there are occasions when men decide for themselves, and their decision is their strength."

Barford required no more; he understood sufficiently the secret wishes of the speaker, and, turning silently away, he called around him a group of men, who, through the underwood, had been watching his interview with him whom they all feared. Mounting his horse, he placed himself at their head, and followed with his party in the track of the fugitives.

"That fellow is a true bloodhound," muttered Cromwell, who was once more alone; "he hath its patience and ferocious instincts. Human respects are as dust weighed in the balance of his passions. Pity hath no voice to move his purpose. Will he succeed? will he attempt it?" he added, musingly. "Well, well, the event is in the womb of time; impatience will not accelerate its birth. In the great work to which I am called, I have no right to reject the instrument, however vile, which the Lord hath fashioned to my hand; the venomous adder and the bloated toad have each a purpose in the scale of being, and this vile thing of earth is not without his uses."

The speaker dismissed the subject from his thoughts, and, with a calm air, directed his heavy step towards the house of Ezekiel Browne. The morning, as the old huntsman had predicted, proved a fine one. The breeze, like a child tired of its passionate sobbings, had sunk to a calm, broken only by faint sighs and whisperings, as it played through the leaves of the forest. As he approached the house, Milton met him at the door. Cromwell saw, by the manly sorrow on his cheek, that all was over—that a great spirit was at rest.

In compliance with the last request of Hampden, it was decided that his body should be removed for interment to the village church which bore his name, that his ashes might repose by the side of those whom in life he loved with the devotion of a faithful nature. His gallant regiment claimed and obtained the dangerous honour of escorting it. We say dangerous, for the flying cavalry of Rupert were scouring the country in all directions, spreading terror and desolation wherever they passed. Slowly, and with arms reversed, they, a troop of stern, determined men, led the way. As they advanced, the gallant men of Buckinghamshire rose in all

directions to protect the hallowed dust from outrage, and soon presented so formidable an array that the daring courage of the Royalists was cooled. They felt a natural disinclination to attack a body marching under the banner of death; its holiness awed them, and although flying parties hung upon their rear, no decided attempts were made to impede their progress.

As the simple *cortège* passed along the green lanes and through the villages, crowds of sturdy yeomen and well-armed peasants joined it, testifying by their deep but silent sorrow their sense of the loss their country had sustained.

On the day which preceded the interment it was rumoured that Rupert intended to attack them, and it was resolved that the ceremony should take place at midnight.

It was an affecting sight: the old village church, dimly lit by a few straggling torches, held by determined hands around the gaping vault, which yawned to receive its noble guest. No escutcheoned banner waved heavily in the night wind; no herald, gorgeously arrayed in his tabard, pronounced the earthly honours of the deceased; they were recorded on a monument more durable than marble—the heart of his country and the gratitude of posterity. Hampden's death had given to the world a pledge of the sacredness of the people's cause; for who could doubt its justice *when he died for it?*

The coffin was placed in the centre of the aisle, adorned by the broken sword of the deceased. Its pall was the colours of his favourite regiment. Dr. Giles, an eminent Protestant divine, stood arrayed in full canonicals at the head; Milton, Pym, and Cromwell at its feet. Seldom have the dead been more honoured. Pickets of the Green-coats were stationed at various distances round the church to keep off all intruders. The silence of the scene, whose only pomp was its simplicity, was broken but by the deep voice of the clergyman as he read the thrilling service of the dead, or the half-suppressed grief of the mourners, who grieved as men not without hope.

The service ended, and the ponderous stones rolled over the sepulchre, the hardy soldiers broke into a hymn, whose enthusiasm had more of triumph than of sorrow. They felt that they had done their duty to their beloved commander, and slowly retired from the spot with stronger faith in the cause for which he fell, with deeper courage and more stern resolves.

The tramp of the retreating horses, and the sound of their riders' voices, became fainter and fainter as they receded from the church. The torches were gradually extinguished as the grey eye of morning opened in sadness on them.

Cromwell and Milton were left alone in the sacred pile praying by the dead. More than an hour elapsed before the silence which reigned was broken by either of them. The soldier was about to

depart, when the poet, hastily waking from his meditation, laid his hand upon his steel-clad shoulder and restrained him.

"Oliver, I would speak with thee as with a brother."

"Speak," was the calm reply.

"Hath it not often seemed to thee that there are moments in which the soul throws off the trammels of the flesh, and sees, with a vision purified from earthly weakness—moments in which time unlocks the portals of the future, to strengthen and forewarn us?"

"It hath."

"E'en such have now passed over me; my thoughts wandered from the dead unto the living. He who should have led the mighty movement of a regenerated people, rising in the strength of their just rights, hath been called away—thou only canst replace him."

"I?" repeated the rough soldier, with a look of half-feigned or real surprise.

"Thou," continued the poet; "and oh, replace him worthily! Let not ambition render thy rich inheritance a curse. Pursue the path he hath marked out for thee with the same singleness and faith he would have trod it; inscribe thy name upon the pedestal of England's liberties achieved; be true to thy high destinies; cast back temptations in the tempter's teeth, for they will assail thee, and see, beyond the greatness of an hour, the glory of succeeding ages—a pearl richer than any crown thy sword can win, or weakness offer thee."

Cromwell started. The speaker's words seemed to reply to the wild dreams which haunted him. It was the searching-knife applied to an inward ulcer, whose existence he deemed a secret to all but himself.

"This is indeed a dream too wild," he muttered, "for a poet's ravings—a crown! to a simple undistinguished soldier!"

"Such things have happened, and may again. Promise me, then, that if the hour should come thou wilt reject the glittering bait."

"Thy request is folly; but I promise thee; here, by the ashes of our mutual friend."

"Enough," said Milton; "let not my words sink unremembered in thy heart; the time will come when I shall remind thee of them. Active duties call thee now; thy bleeding country shows her gaping wounds—thy task must be to bind them. To horse! follow thy destinies. Thine is the task of Joshua—mine, like the priest of old, to watch and pray."

The speakers exchanged a fervent pressure of the hand, and in a few moments the hoofs of the war-steed which Cromwell rode were heard rattling down the path which led from the quiet church. The poet resumed his place by the grave of the dead, and once more sank in meditation.

Faithful to the promise given by them to their dying leader, the

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